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Turner to be replaced at CIA, Reagan said to be sifting five names

Leading contenders: campaign chief Casey, ex-ambassador Silberman?

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Convinced that the nation's intelligence capability has sputtered in the last four years, President-elect Reagan will fire CIA director Stansfield Turner and replace him with one of five men, according to a well-placed source here.

The contenders for the nation's No. 1 intelligence hot seat, according to a well-placed source, are: David Abshire, director of the Center for Strategic and International Studies at Georgetown University in Washington; Ray Cline, executive director for world power studies at the Georgetown Center; Laurence Silberman, a former ambassador to Yugoslavia; Richard Pipes, a Harvard professor of Russian history; and William Casey, chairman of the transition executive committee in the office of the President-elect.

Those reached by the Monitor declined to comment on their possible selection for the job that Admiral Turner has held since 1977.

The front-runners, this source asserts, are Dr. Abshire, Mr. Casey, and Mr. Silberman, while Professor Pipes is "a marginal candidate."

Some intelligence community observers regard Silberman as the leading contender for the CIA directorship. A lawyer and banker, he served as deputy attorney general from 1974 to 1975 and as ambassador to Yugoslavia from 1975 to 1977. He is currently coordinating the transition at the Central Intelligence Agency and already has visited the agency.

Other observers believe that Casey is equally likely to be appointed to the post. A lawyer who fashioned Mr. Reagan's successful campaign, he served as chief of intelligence operations in London for the Office of Strategic Services (OSS) in World War II. He has had no intelligence experience since his days with the OSS, the forerunner of the CIA. But one source says he has maintained "extremely close contact" with US intelligence circles. Casey was appointed to head the Securities and Exchange Commission in 1971 and two years later became undersecretary of state for economic affairs.

Although one analyst claims Abshire "is very well qualified on the scholarly end of intelligence," he says he would nonetheless be "very surprised if he were to come in first." This view seems to be prevalent among intelligence community observers. One such observer went so far as to characterize the professor's selection to the CIA post as "out of the question" and "wholly unrealistic."

Abshire, who is director of foreign policy transition for the incoming administration, is co-editor of Washington Quarterly and a former assistant secretary of state for congressional relations.

That Pipes is being considered for the CIA post surprises some, but it is pointed out that in 1976 he headed the so-called "B team" of the Foreign Intelligence Advisory Board, which produced a more somber estimate of Soviet strategic objectives than that produced by the CIA, the so-called "A team."

Although accused of being alarmist, hard-liners Pipes and associates declared that the Soviet Union was not just striving for strategic parity with the United States, but also for nuclear superiority. Pipes, author of "Revolutionary Russia," and "Soviet Strategy in Europe," is a former director of Harvard's Russian Research Center.

In deliberating on a new CIA chief, Reagan and his advisers are expected to give earnest consideration to Dr. Cline, who also spent his war years with the OSS. An author and lecturer, Cline served as deputy director for intelligence at the CIA from 1962 to 1966 and later as the director of the Bureau of Intelligence and Research at the State Department.

He is thought to have been somewhat miffed when the CIA directorship went to Richard Helms in 1966. His contacts with — and interest in — Taiwan, which date from his days as director of the US Naval Auxiliary Communications Center in Taipei, might not sit well with the government of the People's Republic of China in Peking, some feel. Reagan, however, is not expected to defer to the mainland Chinese in the selection of a CIA boss.

Although Turner reportedly wanted to stay at the CIA, there apparently never was much chance that he would be able to extend his tenure there.

"He came in at a bad time in the history of intelligence," says one source. "But instead of improving it, he has let it languish. He has left us with an insufficient capability in intelligence, and I think that's a very widespread feeling. It certainly is in the agency."

This source adds that, to a degree, Turner engineered his own downfall when he fired or retired "practically all the experienced people in the clandestine side of CIA."

Adds another source: "Turner is an extremely smart guy, but his problem was that he had developed his own technique of institutional reform which worked brilliantly at the Naval War College, where he fired all the dead wood. The agency had already been through all its traumas and did not need surgery. It needed tender, loving care. It was a tragic thing in a way."